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that time. If the checks are inadvertently omitted, or should any additional fees be required for any reason relating to the enclosed materials, or should an overpayment be included herein, the Commissioner is authorized to deduct or credit said fees from Vinson & Elkins L.L.P. Deposit Account No. 22-0365/INN643/4-013.

Please date stamp and return the enclosed postcard evidencing receipt of these materials.

Applicants request reconsideration of the claims as amended. A marked up copy of the amendments is attached to this paper.

Applicants' representatives appreciate the courteous and professional manner in which Examiner Pedder conducted a personal interview on August 20, 2001, with Mr. Floyd, Ms. Davies and Mr. Corder, in which all the claims of record were discussed. The Examiner's comments and suggestions regarding the prior art of record are reflected in the amendments and remarks below.

**AMENDMENT**

Please amend the above-identified application by deleting and adding material according to the description below, consideration of which is respectfully requested.

**I. Claim Amendments**

Please cancel Claims 75-84, 90, and 95 without prejudice or disclaimer.

Please amend the claims as follows:

49. (Amended) A storage system for a vehicle having a cargo area, wherein the cargo area is defined by a floor panel, a roof, and two opposing side walls which each connect the roof to the floor, the storage system comprising at least one storage area adjacent to and separated from the cargo area, the storage area being defined by at least a portion of an outwardly bowed exterior side panel, an inner panel, a top and bottom which connect the inner panel to the exterior

side panel, wherein at least one section of at least one of the outwardly bowed exterior side panels is hinged to provide access to the storage area therein.

50. (Amended) The storage system of Claim 49, wherein at least one storage area extends over at least one rear wheel well.

51. (Amended) The storage system of Claim 49, wherein at least one storage area extends forward and rearward from at least one wheel well.

52. (Amended) The storage system of Claim 49, wherein at least one storage area is constructed to extend along a substantial portion of the side panel.

58. (Amended) The storage system of Claim 49, wherein at least one of the side panels includes more than one hinged section that is capable of being opened to expose the storage area.

61. (Amended) A vehicle having a forward compartment for carrying a driver and an enclosure for passengers, merchandise or equipment wherein the enclosure is disposed to the rear of the driver compartment, and further wherein the enclosure is bounded by exterior, contoured side panels and a rear wall, including at least one rear door;

the vehicle comprising at least one storage area adjacent at least one exterior, contoured side panel and extending into the enclosure of the vehicle, and wherein the side panel adjacent the storage area includes a hinged section effective to provide an opening from the exterior of the vehicle into the storage area.

~~63. (Amended) The vehicle of Claim 61, wherein the forward compartment includes side panels defining its width and wherein the side panels of the enclosure are substantially aligned with the side panels of the forward compartment at the junction of the forward compartment and the enclosure.~~

64. (Amended) The vehicle of Claim 63, wherein the storage system is mounted in the side panel of the enclosure on the driver's side of the vehicle.

65. (Amended) The vehicle of Claim 63, wherein there is a storage system mounted in the side panels of the enclosure on both sides of the vehicle.

66. (Amended) The vehicle of Claim 61, additionally including at least two hinged sections on at least one side of the enclosure, the hinged sections enabling access to at least a portion of the interior of the storage area.

67. (Amended) The vehicle of Claim 61, wherein a storage area is located one of forward or rearward of the wheel well.

68. (Amended) The vehicle of Claim 61, wherein a storage area is located over the wheel well.

69. (Amended) The vehicle of Claim 68, wherein the hinged section is located entirely above the wheel well.

70. (Amended) The vehicle of Claim 68, wherein the hinged section is located over the wheel well.

71. (Amended) The vehicle of Claim 68, wherein the hinged section is located forward and rearward of the wheel well.

72. (Amended) The vehicle of Claim 66, wherein at least one of the hinged sections is hinged horizontally.

85. (Amended) A vehicle comprising a driver's compartment and a rear compartment, the rear compartment including a storage system, the rear compartment comprising:

a floor area bounded on either side by side panels with exterior surfaces defining the width of the rear compartment,

at least one hinged section in the exterior surface of at least one of the side panels,  
 at least one storage area located intermediate the side panels, adjacent the at least one hinged section, and extending into a cargo area of the vehicle, wherein the hinged section is configured to provide access to the storage area when the hinged section is in the open position and wherein the width of the storage area is the same or less than the width of the wheel well;  
 a latch for retaining the at least one hinged contoured side panel section in the closed position; and  
 a strut for retaining the hinged section in the open position.

86. (Amended) The vehicle of Claim 85, wherein the at least one hinged section is hinged horizontally or vertically.

87. (Amended) The vehicle of Claim 85, wherein a temperature control for the strut is provided by at least one of insulating, heating, or heating and insulating.

89. (Amended) The vehicle of Claim 85, wherein the vehicle includes at least one hinged section in each of the outwardly bowed side panels and at least one storage area located adjacent the hinged sections.

93. (Amended) The storage system of Claim 49, wherein the exterior surfaces of the side panels are substantially aligned with the exterior surfaces of the driver's compartment.

94. (Amended) A vehicle comprising a driver's compartment and a rear compartment, the rear compartment including a storage system, the rear compartment comprising:  
 a floor area with opposing edges, a roof with opposing edges, and bounded on either side by side panels extending from the opposing edges of the floor panel to the opposing edges of the roof, and being outwardly bowed, defining the width of the rear compartment and at least one hinged section in the exterior surface of at least one of the side panels,

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at least one storage area located intermediate the side panels, adjacent the at least one hinged section, and extending into a cargo area of the vehicle, wherein the hinged section is configured to provide access to the storage area when the hinged section is in the open position;

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a strut for retaining the hinged section in the open position, wherein a temperature control for the strut is provided by at least one of insulating, heating, or heating and insulating.

Please add the following new claims:

98. The storage system of Claim 49 wherein one section of at least one of the outwardly bowed side panels is hinged to open outwardly to the exterior of the vehicle.

99. The storage system of Claim 49 wherein more than one section of at least one of the outwardly bowed side panels is hinged to open outwardly to the exterior of the vehicle.

100. ~~The storage system of Claim 49 wherein the vehicle having a cargo area is a sports utility vehicle.~~ ✓

101. The storage system of Claim 49 wherein the vehicle having a cargo area is a van.

102. ~~The storage system of Claim 49 wherein the vehicle having a cargo area is a utility vehicle.~~

103. ~~The storage system of Claim 49 wherein the hinged portion of the exterior side panel is located on an inner area of the side panel.~~

104. ~~The storage system of Claim 50 wherein the width of the storage area is less than the width of the wheel well.~~

105. The storage system of Claim 50 wherein the width of the storage area is approximately the same as the width of the wheel well.

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106. The storage system of Claim 49 wherein a portion of the side wall of the cargo area is the opposing side of the inner panel of the storage area.

~~107. The storage system of Claim 50 wherein the width of the storage area is less than the width of the wheel well.~~

108. The storage system of Claim 49 wherein the storage system is fabricated on an assembly line.

109. The vehicle of Claim 61 wherein the storage area is inaccessible from the enclosure.

~~110. The vehicle of Claim 61 wherein the vehicle is a sports utility vehicle.~~

111. The vehicle of Claim 61 wherein the vehicle is a van.

~~112. The vehicle of Claim 61 wherein the vehicle is a utility vehicle.~~

113. The vehicle of Claim 61 wherein the vehicle is fabricated on an assembly line.

~~114. An improved vehicle selected from the group consisting of a sport utility vehicle, a van, and a utility vehicle having outwardly bowed side panels, the improvement comprising:~~

a storage area accessible only from the exterior of the vehicle, said storage area being located adjacent a rear wheel well and extending along at least a portion of the vehicle's outwardly bowed side panel.

~~115. The vehicle of Claim 114 wherein the vehicle is a sports utility vehicle.~~

116. The vehicle of Claim 114 wherein the vehicle is a van.

~~117. The vehicle of Claim 114 wherein the vehicle is a utility vehicle.~~

118. The vehicle of Claim 114 wherein the storage area extending along at least a portion of the vehicle's side panel is accessible via a hinged section in the side panel.

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119. The vehicle of Claim 114 wherein the storage area is substantially centered relative to the width of the rear wheel associated with the wheel well adjacent to the storage area.

120. The vehicle of Claim 118 wherein the storage area further comprises a lock mechanism which is not visible from an external view of the vehicle.

121. The vehicle of Claim 120 wherein the lock mechanism is cable actuated.

122. The vehicle of Claim 121 wherein the lock mechanism is electrically activated.

123. The vehicle of Claim 118 wherein the storage area further comprises a key actuated lock mechanism.

124. The vehicle of Claim 118 wherein the storage area further comprises at least one shelf.

125. In a vehicle having a cargo area bounded by a bottom panel, a top panel, and two opposing outwardly bowed side panels which connect the bottom panel to the top panel, the improvement which comprises:

at least one storage area inaccessible from within the cargo area, wherein said storage area is located adjacent to a rear wheel well, the storage area being defined by at least a portion of an outwardly bowed exterior side panel, an inner panel, a top, and a bottom which connect the inner panel to the exterior side panel, wherein said storage area is substantially centered relative to the width of the rear wheel associated with the wheel well adjacent to the storage area and wherein the width of the storage area is the same or less than the width of the wheel well.

126. A storage system for a vehicle having a cargo area and a pair of side panels disposed on either side of the cargo area, the storage system comprising at least one storage area located intermediate the side panels and extending into the cargo area of the vehicle, and comprising:

at least one opening effective to expose the interior of the storage area;

at least one section of at least one of the side panels being hinged, the hinged section effective to provide access to the storage area therein,

and wherein said storage system comprises at least one strut assembly operatively connected to retain the at least one hinged section of the side panel in an opened position and wherein the at least one strut assembly provides a temperature control during use, the control being insulation, heating, or heating and insulation.

127. A vehicle having a forward compartment for carrying a driver and an enclosure for passengers, merchandise or equipment wherein the enclosure is disposed to the rear of the driver compartment, and further wherein the enclosure is bounded by side panels and a rear wall, including at least one rear door, the vehicle comprising at least one storage area adjacent at least one side panel and extending into the enclosure of the vehicle, and wherein at least one side panel includes a hinged section effective to provide an opening from the exterior of the vehicle into the storage area and a mechanism for securing the at least one hinged section in the closed position,

wherein said vehicle includes at least one strut assembly operatively connected to retain the hinged section in an opened position and wherein the at least one strut assembly provides a temperature control during use, the control being insulation, heating, or heating and insulation.

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## II. Remarks

Claims 75-84, 90, and 95 have been canceled without prejudice or disclaimer. Applicants reserve the right to prosecute these claims and/or the subject matter of these claims in a related application either now or at a later date. Claims 49-74, 85-89, 91-94, and 96-97 stand rejected. New claims, Claims 98-127, have been added. Thus, Claims 49-74, 85-89, 91-94, and 96-127